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PRESS RELEASE

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AUTUMN GRASSES: ARTS OF THE MOMOYAMA PERIOD (1573-1615)
October 4 - December 11, 1988

More than thirty choice works from The Cleveland Museum of Art's world famous collection of Japanese art will go on special exhibition in the Museum's Screen Room from October 4 through December 11, 1988. All come from the brief span of years, 1573-1615, called the Momoyama period, a "Golden Age" of Japanese art. The exhibition, titled **Autumn Grasses**, is one in the annual series of exhibitions mounted each fall from the Museum's Asian collections, under the general title Asian Autumn.

"Given the importance and appreciation of Momoyama art in Japan, it's very difficult to assemble an exhibition of these materials," says Michael Cunningham, the Museum's curator of Japanese art and chief curator of the Asian Art Department. "The Cleveland Museum is one of the few museums outside Japan that can do this, and in all media, from its own collections."

Momoyama is the term embracing that moment in Japanese history when the Japanese wrenched themselves from 200 years in the cultural grip of classical Chinese art and vigorously revived their native styles. In place of the subtle ink drawings and paintings of Chinese tradition, they turned again to the Japanese taste for bold colors, vivid (often gold leaf) backgrounds, and dramatic patterns and shapes in every medium.

Among the exhibition's major works, which exemplify the best lacquers, ceramics, and paintings of the period, are a lacquer cosmetic box with a wisteria design, a red Oribe tile, and a pair of six-fold screens

depicting pampas grasses. The screens echo an old custom in Japan, dating back to Japan's first "Golden Age," the Heian period (10th-12th century); seasonal subjects painted on screens--such as pampas grasses, which are an autumn favorite in Japan--often inspired poetry contests among a group of friends and colleagues, who brushed their verses onto colorful squares of paper, which were then pasted to the screens. The dim outlines of more than thirty poem papers on autumnal themes, once affixed to these screens, can be seen scattered over the surface.

The red stoneware Oribe tile may have served as a platform for a brazier used to heat the water kettle for the tea ceremony. The inventive decoration combines natural floral motifs (plum blossoms and water weeds) with unusual abstract designs. The resulting asymmetry of the design strikes a surprisingly peaceful balance, expressing the highest ideals of imagination and harmony fostered by the tea ceremony.

The cosmetic box is made of red lacquer over wood, with gold, silver, pewter, and bronze decorative elements. Lacquer, which has been used for many centuries in Asia to protect and decorate objects made of wood or clay, is a costly material demanding high technical and artistic skill. Such a cosmetic box would have been presented to temples and shrines during the Heian period, and during the Momoyama era similar boxes became luxury items available to the wealthy and to the powerful military class.

A rich and varied schedule of programs--performances, lectures, demonstrations, and films--will take place throughout the fall of 1988 as part of Asian Autumn. A free poster-flyer lists all these programs. They complement two special exhibitions drawn from the Cleveland collection, the

exhibition just opening, *Autumn Grasses*, and the exhibition which opened in mid-September, *A Private World*, Japanese and Chinese art collected by the late Kelvin Smith and given to the Museum by Mrs. Smith. Dr. Cunningham organized both exhibitions, and was assisted on *Autumn Grasses* by Joellen DeOreo of the Museum's Education Department and Joseph Finizia, designer at the Museum.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland OH 44106; 216/421-7340.